

Euroregion Baltic Position Paper on the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

Input to the 2nd EUSBSR Annual Forum and the revision of the Strategy

Approved by the Euroregion Baltic Board 2011-09-27

The European Commission highlights in the Annual Report from 2010 that during the upcoming Polish EU presidency in the second half of 2011 there “[...] is an opportunity for a more fundamental review of the Strategy”.

Euroregion Baltic believes

there is room for improvement to ensure successful implementation of the EUSBSR and discusses it further below. The Strategy being relatively new, it is too early to draw conclusions on its long-term potential. Changes should therefore be moderate and only introduced to improve its implementation. A more fundamental review of the Strategy should be the subject of an open consultation with the stakeholders in the region.

Established in 1998 ERB is a politically solid and well-anchored cross-border cooperation platform in the south-east of the Baltic Sea region, consisting of nine member organisations from eight regions of Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. ERB is the first euroregion to have formally included a partner from Russia.

ERB was an early supporter of establishing an EU macro-regional strategy that would facilitate the development of the Baltic Sea Region and actively participated in the drafting of EUSBSR and monitoring of the EUSBSR. The member regions are active in the implementation of the EUSBSR, for example as:

- flagship project leaders,
- horizontal action leaders; and
- co-organisers of the 2nd EUSBSR Annual Forum

The ERB Position Paper is divided into the following headlines:

- Positive Experiences of the EUSBSR so far
- Recommendations for improvement
 - *Communication*
 - *Monitoring*
 - *Organisational Structure*
 - *Alignment of funding*
 - *Multilevel governance and regional anchoring*
 - *Cooperation with Russia*
 - *Political commitment*
- Proposals for new flagship projects

1. Positive experiences of the EUSBSR so far

It has only been a short time since the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was launched but it is already clear that it has served as a catalyst for cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region on different levels and in different sectors. Since the local and regional levels have been long active in the cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region, it is perhaps the national and EU levels where increased commitment has been most evident.

When the Strategy was drafted the DG Regio ensured a good dialogue with the stakeholders in the region through the public hearing, four round-table conferences, two stakeholder conferences and youth stakeholder conference. The openness from the DG Regio EUSBSR Team to input from different stakeholders at different levels of society, including various BSR organisations in the drafting and implementation phase, has been vital in the process.

The 2010 EUSBSR Report including the annexes and the 2011 Report on the Implementation of the EUSBSR have been important documents enabling us to follow the implementation progress. The future oriented approach of the 2011 report, highlighting both lessons learned and recommendations, was broadly in line with the experiences of Euroregion Baltic.

Another positive example so far in the implementation of the EUSBSR is improved multilevel communication in different member states:

- Managed by the Danish National Contact Point (NCP) communication in Denmark has created good information flows and multilevel dialogue in the Danish EUSBSR Committee.
- The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth has created a network with EUSBSR stakeholders from relevant national authorities and regional level.
- In Poland a special task force of ministry representatives, national and regional managing authorities, and PACs has been established and assigned to coordinate the implementation of the EUSBSR, as well as to support the National Contact Point.

2. Recommendations for improvement

Euroregion Baltic believes there is room for improvement in several areas to ensure successful implementation of the EUSBSR and discusses it in detail below.

2.1. Improve the communication of the Strategy

The ambition for all stakeholders of the EUSBSR should be to strive for good information flows, as well as multilevel and intersectoral communication. Euroregion Baltic welcomes the recommendation by the European Commission to "develop a communication initiative".

The European Commission has an important task to communicate the status of the Strategy concerning its implementation, monitoring and governance. The National Contact Points have an important role in promoting and communicating the Strategy, as well as stimulating active involvement in the implementation in the Strategy in their respective countries. The experience so far from the 15 Priority Areas is that the intensity and quality of information, dissemination and

communication differs a great deal between the PAs. Some PACs and flagship project leaders have been hard to come in contact with.

Recommendations by Euroregion Baltic

- Communication responsibilities of the Commission, the National Contact Points, Priority Areas Coordinators and Horizontal Action Leaders should be clarified.
- Information on when the HLWG meets, what the main issues for discussion are and minutes after the meetings should be made available to increase transparency.
- Information can easily be made available online on the DG Regio EUSBSR web page and web pages for each Priority Area which need to be expanded and updated regularly.
- The DG Regio EUSBSR web site should gather all flagships projects preparing applications in a database in order to simplify match making and partner search, as well as to increase transparency.

2.2 Improve the monitoring of the Strategy

To be able to follow the progress of implementation and evaluate the Strategy, it is important to have a monitoring system with overall targets and indicators. Euroregion Baltic welcomes the initiative by the European Commission to form a task force for this.

Recommendations by Euroregion Baltic

- In the 2011 EUSBSR Report the Commission highlights that “proposed targets and indicators should be widely consulted.” When doing so, it is important that the Commission and National Contact Points consult stakeholders from the local and regional level, as well as euroregions and other relevant actors in the Baltic Sea Region.
- It is important that the proposed targets and indicators are coherent with the Europe 2020 Strategy. The coherence between Europe 2020 and the macro-regional strategies is also important when selecting of new flagship projects. The relation between and Europe 2020 needs to be clarified.

2.3 Improve the organisational structure of the Strategy

To make the EUSBSR more transparent it is important to improve the organisational structure of the Strategy. Euroregion Baltic welcomes the initiative by the European Commission to form a task force for this to clarify roles and responsibilities.

Recommendations by Euroregion Baltic

- The different roles of the Commission, National Contact Points, Priority Area Coordinators, Horizontal Action leaders and the High-Level Working Group, as well as interaction between them should be clarified and communicated.
- There is a need of strengthening the role of the National Contact Points (NCPs) and make them more visible. It could be beneficial for the NCPs to exchange experiences on how to

improve the anchoring, the multilevel and intersectoral communication, with reference to the Danish example above.

- It seems necessary to strengthen the role of the Priority Area Coordinators and Horizontal Action leaders and make them more visible.
- The Commission should stimulate and take part in discussions with each Priority Area with the purpose of clarifying the status of the flagship projects and defining criteria for selecting and closing flagship projects.

2.4 Improve alignment of funding

One of the basic principles of the EUSBSR was no new funding; instead available funding should be aligned with the Strategy. The basic idea of the Strategy on alignment of EU funds has not been implemented yet, as the Strategy seems to have been primarily discussed under the Cohesion Policy programmes.

Recommendations by Euroregion Baltic

- In the current programme period there is a risk of gap between programming periods, especially concerning the European Territorial Cooperation programmes. In order to reduce the risk of a vacuum in the Strategy implementation, the Commission should improve communication on other funding opportunities, e.g. by establishing an EUSBSR "one-stop-shop" gathering information on all available funding, including loans.
- In the next programme period it is important that the territorial dimension and macro-regional strategies have an impact on the different financing mechanisms in EU, not just the Cohesion Policy programme, with reference to the Territorial Agenda 2020 and the inclusion of territorial cohesion in Lisbon Treaty. Better alignment should be ensured with programs for R&D (such as the upcoming Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation), TEN-T, Intelligent Energy, Lifelong Learning, Life etc.
- In the Cohesion Policy in the next period, the role of the Strategy should be clarified when it comes to objective 1 and 2 programmes.
- The Strategy objectives should be taken into consideration while designing European Territorial Cooperation Operational Programmes for 2014 – 2020 with the participation of the countries of the Baltic Sea Region so that these programmes become more efficient tools to implement the Strategy. The division into cross-border, transnational and inter-regional programmes should be kept since they all contribute to the implementation of the EUSBSR.
- In the next period it is crucial to ensure good funding mechanisms for partners in the Kaliningrad Region of the Russian Federation to be able to take part in the implementation of the EUSBSR. ERB believes that a programme co-financed by the ERDF could be such a mechanism.
- ERB has a long experience of local and regional co-operation for a cleaner Baltic Sea and supports the idea of an intergovernmental fund for local water correlated investments, designed in such a way that funds can be used by local and regional actors around the Baltic Sea.

2.5 Improved multi-level governance and regional anchoring of the Strategy

To make the EUSBSR a success it is important to involve the stakeholders in region in the process of implementing, monitoring and reviewing the Strategy. There is therefore a need to improved multi-level governance and the regional anchoring of the Strategy.

Recommendations by Euroregion Baltic

- Ensure that multi-level governance is applied in all aspects of the Strategy implementation.
- Encourage the Baltic Sea regions to embed the EUSBSR in their own regional action programmes and development strategies.
- Develop the EUSBSR Annual Forum to be an arena for all stakeholders to meet, discuss the progress and needs for improvements.
- Involve also local and regional actors as flagship project leaders.
- Encourage all key stakeholders of the EUSBSR (NCPs, PACs etc) to take into account the new horizontal action called multi-level governance, local and regional spatial planning and sustainable development in their work of implementing the EUSBSR.

2.6 Increase cooperation with Russia

It is of great importance to ensure good cooperation with Russia and its Baltic Sea regions in the implementation of the Strategy.

As a stakeholder of the EUSBSR, ERB will continue its initiatives to the benefit of the growth of the whole region involving the Kaliningrad Region of the Russian Federation, a neighbour to the EU and an important partner of the ERB cooperation.

Recommendations by Euroregion Baltic

- In the next period it is crucial to ensure good funding mechanisms for partners in Kaliningrad/Russia to be able to take part in the implementation of the EUSBSR. Especially in the CBC South Baltic Programme.

2.7 Secure political commitment of the Strategy

It is important to secure the political commitment for the Strategy, to eliminate the risk of the Strategy just becoming a paper not implemented.

Recommendations by Euroregion Baltic

- Communicate the added value of the EUSBSR, its targets and objectives and progress of implementation.
- Improve multilevel-governance to anchor the Strategy on the local and regional level, and to increase the feel of ownership of the Strategy.
- Stimulate an ongoing debate on Baltic issues and the macro-regional approach involving all actors and levels.

3. Proposals for new flagship projects

Euroregion Baltic proposes the following to become included as flagship projects in the EUSBSR Action Plan:

3.1 ERB Youth Board as an example of non-formal learning

ERB Youth Board is an integrated part of the political cooperation Euroregion Baltic (ERB) that includes partners from Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. The ERB member regions elect youth representatives forming the ERB Youth Board and as a member of the ERB Board, the Youth Board Chair person has the responsibility for the promotion of youth perspectives. The ERB Youth Board also works to stimulate opportunities for youth, eliminate cultural prejudice and enhance youth mobility. The platform gives the youth representatives an arena for international non formal learning concerning youth influence and youth cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region.

Lead: Euroregion Baltic

Deadline: For progress review, to be determined

Priority Area 12: Education & Youth

3.2 Participating water management

Local and regional involvement in river basin based water management. Better communication and cooperation between stakeholders at all levels. Further development and extension of local Water User Partnerships (WUP) as a method for managing water according to the EU Water Framework Directive requirements. Development of tools that can assist the WUP in placing necessary cost-effective measures at the right location.

Lead: Regional Council in Kalmar County

Deadline: For progress review, to be determined

Priority Area 1: To reduce nutrient inputs to the sea to acceptable levels